

The Economic Committee Meeting of The Global Coalition for Africa

Opening Remarks by

K. Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary, ECA

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Addis Ababa

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency, Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

My good friend Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization,

Honourable Co-Chairpersons and members of the Global Coalition for Africa,

Your Excellencies,

Friends,

It is a true pleasure to welcome you to this two-day meeting of GCA's Economic Committee. We meet in a new conference centre, in a renewing regional commission, in a country, like many in Africa, now making progress. The climate for progress is in no small part due to the forward-looking, supportive and often compelling force of GCA and its alliance for a brighter tomorrow for Africa. Not only is your work exemplary: The example of your coalition and the splendid shared leadership GCA is fortunate to enjoy, is proof of the value of bridging interests around larger common purposes. So this welcome to you is also a salute and an encouragement to you individually and collectively to continue your essential work in this meeting and beyond.

Your agenda is a formidable one and I will be short to permit you to get to the issues soon. Permit me however just a few observations which the unique situation of ECA affords.

We are in a particularly dynamic time. Africa, the donor system, the multilateral system and the regional institutions here on this continent are all in a period of flux. Surely, this dynamism will affect your deliberations over the next few days.

Africa, in our view, is the glass half full and half empty.. a considerable improvement over a few years ago, but certainly a continent whose overall development future is still in the balance. For those unfortunate enough to face the empty part of development, the stakes of peace, rigorous government and pluralism are not yet clear enough. Indeed, the pace of progress in some of the so-called success states is still too insecure to prevent fears of back-sliding. What we are beginning to appreciate more, is that not only is the South becoming more differentiated, Africa is also becoming more differentiated. It is harder now to think of "the" right response on many issues. It is compelling to begin to think of ranges of response.

In the long run, it is through broadly based growth, better access to jobs and social services, and through empowerment and participation in the decisions that affect their lives that the majority of our people can emerge from poverty. Clearly, both adjustment and growth are needed, but Africa needs to ensure that efforts at growth succeed, particularly in the social sectors and on those socio-economic issues involving women. We could well be entering a very exciting era ahead on the socially inspired issues. There is a momentum for these issues growing with the help of local constituencies often found working for progress in health, education, WID and NGO-led development. We would do well to reinforce these constituencies. But we clearly are lacking the constituency for food security and population. For these survival issues, the sell must somehow reach the political level more profoundly.

The donor system also is in a dynamic time. Development assistance has a positive learning curve. Donors are more discerning about their programmes, design with more care and are now more focused on the core problems of development. Collectively, donors for the first time, at least on paper, have agreed at the DAC on what they can and should achieve together. The DAC paper "Sharpening the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation" (OECD/DAC, May 1996) is a potential landmark, focussing on specific goals on human development, poverty and environmental issues of fundamental importance. Seeking collective coherence is also illustrated in the multilateral system with the launching of the UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa.

Despite these bright signs, donors are backing off. The prospects are that through the end of the century, we will see a continuing soft landing in aid levels. The aid record in Africa has seen stellar achievements, and less lofty results, the latter reflecting not only mal-governance issues, but also problems in donor programmes. ECA is being urged to help Africa prepare for alternatives to aid. That is certainly a future issue. In the meantime, friends of donor-Africa partnership such as GCA and ECA, must cope with new realities and must see that issues of coordination and improved performance are more solidly built into the recommendations we give on issues like those in your excellent agenda.

Likewise, the multilateral system is in flux. The actions of a few key donors have seen to that. But even in their absence, there are challenges to the multilateral system which deserve attention. We, in Africa are intrigued with WTO. Its leaders would agree that WTO has not yet had time to prove its worth to the continent. To some, it is also clear that more than the Uruguay Round will need to be deployed to address Africa's trade challenges. We are encouraged by the leadership of the World Bank and IMF on debt reform, but we recognize that leaders of these institutions are a bit ahead of some of their key finance ministers. Meanwhile, UN development efforts, which are just getting started on the path of real coordination, also must fend off attacks which are sometimes delivered with puzzling ferocity.

I suspect that GCA is faced with a more complex task as it reviews the donor field in general and the multilateral field in particular. Not only will GCA be in a position to continue to make the case for Africa, but it must now do so in a way which also justifies the full engagement of the donor field and the multilateral system, and will make the cost to corrupt leadership in Africa

much higher.

We are beginning to be upbeat about private investment in Africa. The ECA sponsored with GCA and others a major conference on investment in Africa in Ghana in late June. I come away from that experience invigorated about foreign investment prospects, but also aware that many countries will not benefit for the next years from such investment inflows, and that it will not address a backlog of social investment needs.

Finally, regional institutions are in flux here in Africa. I will not speak for ADB or OAU, except to mention that the regional multilateral debt issue remains to be fully resolved. The issue goes not only to the financial health of nations, it goes to the health of a key regional institution. Also, we need larger investments in peace, such as endowing peace-building and conflict prevention work at the OAU.

I will speak, however, about ECA. Here we are engaged in an extraordinary reform. Extraordinary because over the last year, we have put everything on the table. We have analyzed virtually every programme and administrative function, and we are creating a renewed ECA. We are underpinning our future with the creation of networks and alliances, particularly to be able to draw upon and showcase the growing policy and programme expertise in Africa. In our concept, the hallmark of ECA in the future will be an institution rich in working partnerships for Africa. So you can see our added joy that GCA is with us. You represent a vibrant partnership of interests. You represent a constellation of intellectual talent. You are indeed a partner with Africa. It is thus, natural that I will look, and hope you have a personal sub-theme of also looking, for the opportunities GCA and ECA have for synergies in our future work. While you are here, I hope you take a bit of your time to share with us ideas for potential collaborations.

With so many issues in flux and with so much talent here to clarify future courses and to propose future partnerships with Africa, your meeting comes at a challenging time. To wish you well is to wish us well.

Welcome. This is your home not only for two days, but for whenever you wish.

<< Back to: [1996 Speeches](#)